

The INQUIRER

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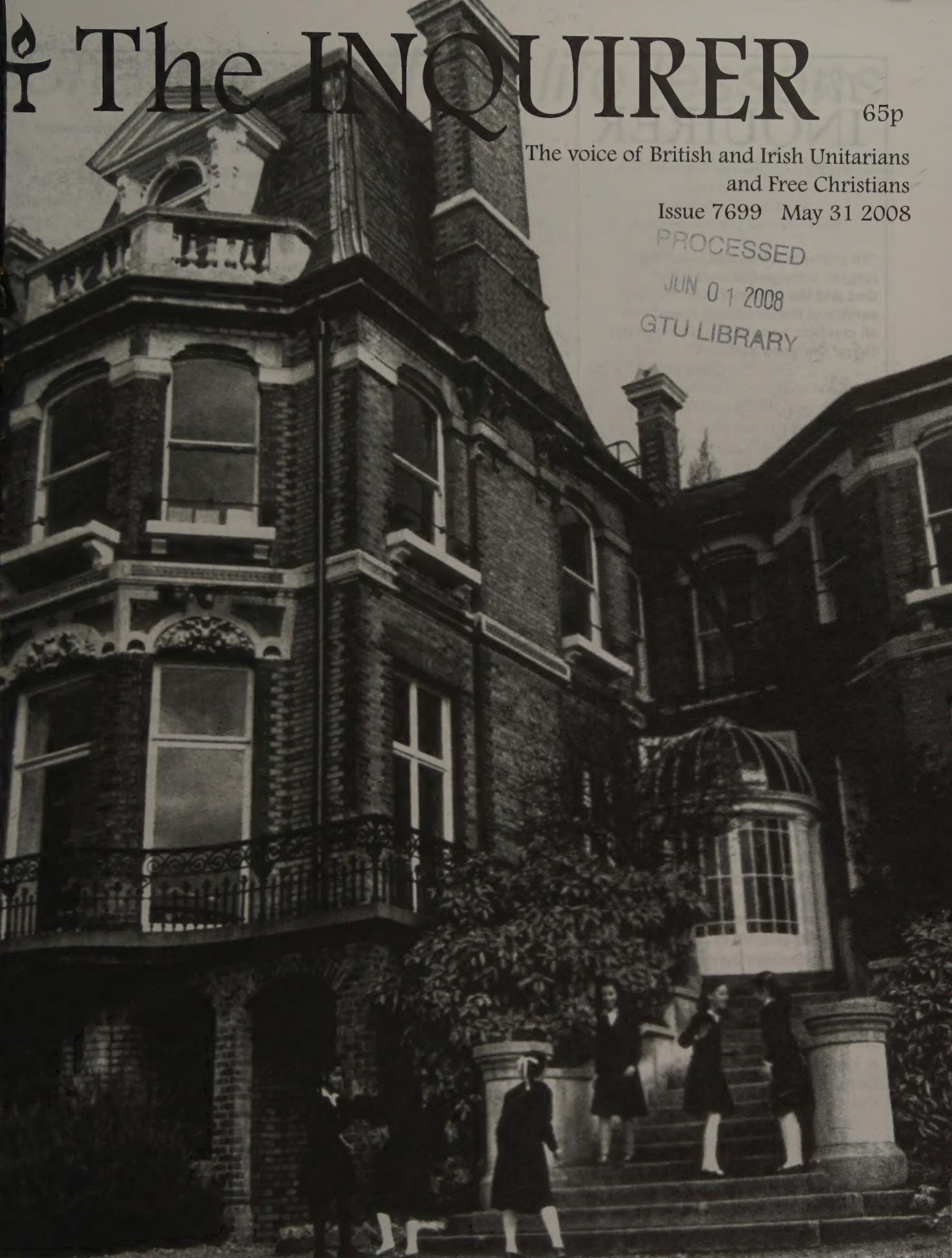
The voice of British and Irish Unitarians
and Free Christians

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*Channing teaches
Unitarian values*

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring
religion through the worship of
God and the celebration of life; the
service of humanity and respect for
all creation; and the upholding of the
liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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Inquiring Words

A Prayer for Flower Communion Sunday: Remembering Our International Family of Faith

In the presence of these flowers,

These representatives of Creation's profound beauty:

Diverse and Unique, but Related and Interdependent,

These flowers which come to us as gifts from we know not where
And which we, in turn, choose to bring to our shared and common altar

As gifts to one another

In their presence we turn our thoughts to the mystery beyond mysteries
to the most sacred—which we never understand fully
but which we are granted revelatory glimpses of

in each of these flowers,

in each of your faces,

and through relationships with neighbors near and far

May they remind us of grace we have known in days past:
Forgiveness we have been granted, and provided.

Love, unearned and shared.

Recovery, begun and established.

Generosity, unforeseen and most sacred.

And may they inspire us now, and in days to come:

To seek,

To notice,

To embrace and,

To re-create beauty.

To give unto the world as exuberantly as these flowers.

Our spiritual support this morning turns, especially, to brothers and sisters around
the world who share our faith (as a litany):

For the Unitarian Universalists of Pakistan, who are seeking to comfort the victims
of terrorist bombings, *Amen.*

For the Ugandan Unitarian Universalists who have created a school for hundreds
of children of parents who have died from HIV/AIDS, and who are now building
that school's walls, even before they have built the walls of a church, *Amen.*

For the Kenyan Unitarian Universalists who are recovering from the post-election
violence in their country, and who inspire us through the service they provide to
those who suffer in their communities. *Amen.*

For the Indonesian Unitarian Universalists who dream of a day when religious
freedom and tolerance are common, *Amen.*

For the Unitarians of North East India who suffered the untimely death of their
General Secretary, Brington Mylliemngap in March, but who remain inspired by his
witness, *Amen.*

For the British Unitarians who are embarking upon exciting paths of towards
justice and growth, *Amen.*

For the Transylvanian and Hungarian Unitarians who have born witness to our
faith for so many centuries, and with whom we discover so much about ourselves,
Amen.

For the UUs of the Philippines who testify to the practical healing power of our
faith, *Amen.*

For the Unitarians of Prague and the Czech Republic, who maintain the vision of
Norbert Capek, the vision which calls us to the Flower Communion today, *Amen.*

For all Unitarian Universalists around the world, in congregations large and small,
as much as for those who, like Thomas Jefferson, must be content to be Unitarians
by themselves, for all who embrace Freedom, Reason and Tolerance as hallmarks
of Faith and proclaim a vision of Peace with Justice, we reach out with
love and care and gratitude. *Amen.*

May the meaning and message of Flower Communion be alive in our hearts,
inviting us to be faithful partners in the creation of beloved community, and
guiding us towards right relationship with all of our neighbors, near and far.
Amen.

— William G. Sinkford
President of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Channing offers life lessons

By Barbara Elliott

I wonder how many readers of this newspaper know about Channing School? I must admit to knowing very little about it when I saw an advert in 2005 inviting applications for the post of Headmistress.

In 1884, Miss Matilda Sharpe and the Rev Robert Spears, together with Miss Matilda's elder sister Miss Emily Sharpe, began to raise the necessary funds to enable them to open Channing House School. Their aim was to translate into a practical proposition in North London the general interest in and enthusiasm for the proper education of women that was characteristic of the Unitarian community in the nineteenth century. In 1885, a Unitarian High School for Girls at Highgate in North London was opened. Channing House School was named in honour of William Ellery Channing, an eminent American Unitarian philosopher, preacher, educationalist and author. He had died in 1842 and his writings, particularly the published volumes of sermons, were much admired by many Unitarians of the time. Every year, we celebrate Founders' Day on the first Saturday of July, a day of great excitement at school, when we are filled to overflowing with examples of the girls' very best work, displays of music, drama and art, a famously delicious tea and hundreds of visitors.

One of my tasks each year, as Headmistress, is to search through the sermons of Channing and find some pearls of wisdom for the Chairman of Governors to read at our Founders' Day Service. I have to admit that it is not always easy to find something from the first half of the 19th century that is immediately relevant to the young woman here at the start of the 21st, but when one digs a little deeper, there are usually plenty of moments of eternal truth to share from the platform. Girls today are indeed privileged to enjoy still the hopes and ideal of our founders: that girls should be educated to make their lives as rich and useful as possible; that there should be no false or artificial barriers to freedom of thought; and that excellence should be the aim in all we do.

Readers will see that in 2010 we will celebrate our 125th anniversary and plans are already underway to mark this special anniversary.

We are also blessed to have a Unitarian Minister on our staff.



Matilda Sharp and Emily Sharp (below). Photos courtesy of Channing School

The Rev Sarah Tinker, who will be known to many readers, is very generously "released" by her congregation to come and deliver the Religious Education curriculum to our girls. Prior to her arrival, we were fortunate to have the Rev Keith Gilley as our Head of RE. He combined that role with his editorship of *The Inquirer*.

I am delighted to report that the Unitarian ethos is alive and well and thriving here on Highgate Hill. We have about 560 girls, aged from 4 to 18, with many, many more eager to come: we simply do not have room for them all. People are drawn to Channing, not only because of its excellent academic standards, and its exquisite location with splendid views across the city of London. I believe that more and more people are drawn to the spirit of tolerance and respect and the "inclusivity" offered by our community. Please do come and visit us.

Barbara Elliott is Headmistress of Channing School.

About Channing

We aim to encourage lively, independent minds, personal confidence and concern for others; to give girls the confidence, qualifications and skills they will need in life; and to send our leavers out ready to respond as thoughtful, responsible and socially aware adults to the challenges of the world today.

We aim to remain true to the ideals of our Unitarian foundation, to develop spiritual sensitivity and understanding and in particular to foster respect and consideration for the whole range of human faiths and beliefs.

From the Channing School web site.

Blasphemy – it's finally gone!

By Alan Ruston

John Gott was the last man to go to prison for blasphemy in Britain. It was 1921 and he wrote that Christ entered Jerusalem, 'like a circus clown astride the backs of two donkeys.' Blasphemy is defined as profane language about God, and is an offence under the common law in England and Wales. However, it refers only to the Christian God and the law has been used as a threat by those of strong views against those who put in writing something they do not like. It was, until recently, open to anyone to take a legal action, a threat used regularly in the 1970s by Mrs Whitehouse, the famous guardian of our 'morals.'

As recently as 1976, the editor of *Gay News* was fined and given a suspended sentence for publishing James Kirkup's poem, 'The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name', which saw Christ as gay. When Joan Bakewell repeated the poem on BBC TV in 2002, she was threatened with a similar action. The GA passed a resolution in her support for which she wrote she was most grateful.

While Unitarians have not suffered in recent times under the common-law blasphemy offence, we have since the 19th century consistently pressed for its abolition. We have seen it as an infringement of civil liberty. It has been secularists like Gott, as well as libertarians, who have been on the receiving end of the court's decisions.

Some have argued that the blasphemy law should be extended to cover other religious beliefs, and the issue has been caught up in the controversy about incitement to religious hatred. Others, mainly Muslims, believe the offence should be retained as, while it does not cover them, to abolish it can be

seen as another triumph of secularism. There have been numerous Parliamentary Commissions on the subject to which we have submitted our views. The results have been inconclusive.

Sections in more than one draft Bill have appeared that would have abolished it but for one reason or another they have fallen by the wayside. Those, like ourselves, who wished to see the end of this piece of ancient and outmoded thinking, have despaired of ever seeing its departure – even though legal experts do not believe a successful action could be mounted. Politicians have mainly seen it as a problem issue to avoid.

The Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill introduced in 2007 looked no different with no mention of blasphemy – there seems to be one like it each year. However, a few months ago an amendment to abolish blasphemy was introduced in the House of Lords, and, despite the bishops of the Church of England sitting on the fence, stating they would not oppose abolition but did not think this was the right time to do it, the provision was passed and then accepted by the Commons.

Such things have happened before but this time it has worked and has gone all the way through. The Bill received Royal Assent on 8 May 2008, and Section 79 states: 'The offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel under the common law of England and Wales are abolished.' Readers of *The Inquirer* should be pleased to learn that an issue so often appearing in its columns and one on which Unitarians have pressed the government repeatedly, has been resolved and civil liberty in this area at least has been enhanced. Hooray!

Alan Ruston is a member of Watford Unitarian Fellowship.

Fellowship learns from Muslim speaker

By Jane Howarth

Chelmsford Unitarian Fellowship invited Dr Muhammad Ahsan, FRSA, to lead the discussion at their regular meeting for Worship and Discussion on 13th April. Dr Ahsan has a PhD in International Relations. The meeting arose from a conversation between himself and Jane Howarth from the Fellowship on an interfaith picnic: what made the golden age in Moorish Spain possible? Could we learn from it today?

We were joined by Muslims and Quakers from the Inter-Faith Forum, and a member of the Baptist Church which kindly lent an OHP for the occasion. Pat Baxter's opening worship was a feast for the senses with music for the ancient, universal harp, an exhortation that we hold in our minds our vision of our shared universe and the mystery behind and at the heart of it, a beautiful photograph of deep space from the Hubble telescope, and meditations, one by Rev Cliff Reed on a Surah from the Qur'an.

The thrust of Dr Ahsan's message was that Christians, Muslims and Jews had lived harmoniously together for 800 years because there was tolerance and goodwill between the communities, and because people from all the communities were involved in positions of authority. He pointed to the high levels of education – 800 schools in Cordoba alone. Contacts between scholars, such as the respected Jewish scholar Maimonides and the influential Muslim scholar Averroes, led to



Pat Baxter (left) led worship at the Chelmsford Fellowship with Dr Muhammad Ahsan

fruitful exchanges of ideas.

Dr Ahsan said that he did not believe that the idea of a clash of civilisations was a natural one. However the conflict that arises from powerful nations seeking to ensure their oil supplies, the huge rise in inequality between rich and poor countries, and writers whose works raise fears about our ability to live together, all make our task very hard. We must realise that global insecurity is in no-one's interest. Muslim countries should explore ways of using their resources more equitably. And in religion we need to focus on what we share – principles of mutual respect and tolerance. These enable us to manage our differences.

Jane Howarth is a member of Chelmsford Fellowship.

Review: Buy this book immediately

The Unitarian Life: Voices from the Past and Present,
edited by Stephen Lingwood (London: Lindsey Press, 2008)
ISBN: 978 0 85319 076 9 £9.99

Review by Margaret Hamer

Rarely can a book have been so welcomed by Unitarians – all copies at the bookstall had vanished before the General Assembly meetings were two days old. Rarely can so long-felt a need been so appropriately addressed. And rarely can such a book, which appeals to all kinds and conditions of readership, have appeared from so unexpected a source. Stephen Lingwood has just completed his training for the ministry at University College, Manchester. His academic career covers an impressive range of study in the disciplines of geology, biology and theology. This appetite for research has certainly benefited the rest of us for it is clear that he possesses a rare talent for selecting, categorising and ordering a wide range of Unitarian materials, both British and American. One can only applaud the imagination, energy and dedication involved in undertaking such an enterprise. Youth can achieve what age only dreams of. Ministers approaching the green pastures of retirement have sometimes spoken of compiling some kind of anthology, only to quail at the mountain of copyrights to be climbed. In this particular respect, the book should be regarded as a joint enterprise and all due credit must be given (as the author acknowledges) to those members of the Lindsey Press Panel, Donald Phillips and, especially, Catherine Robinson, for undertaking so herculean a task.

The Unitarian Life is divided into four sections: *The Principles and values of Unitarianism; Unitarian diversity; Unitarian perspectives; and How to live 'Unitarianly'*. Each contains a wide variety of topics illustrated with appropriate extracts from writers past and present – some of them familiar, many of them new. Two extremely helpful sections of biographical details and 20 pages of endnotes complete the enterprise. Each reader will soon compile a list of favourite contributors for further reading – I, for example, shall certainly seek out more of Tom Owen Towle and A Powell Davies. Even the

most cursory dip into the text is a stimulating experience. As for coverage, none of the entries are extensive. 'God' receives six pages, made up from 16 contributions; 'Life Journeys', a favourite subject with each of us, only three; and 'Religious

Education' is reduced to a mere page and a half (although this may portend the shape of things to come!). On the other hand, we are provided with a host of fresh categories and are given some very positive leads. Industrious readers might try devising their own lists before consulting the pages of contents and see how they fare!

The uses of such a book are multiple. Service takers will find it invaluable when needing a reading on, say, Unitarian views on science and technology, or the family, or on politics, or any other of the more than 60 topics listed. Study groups will be able to focus discussion on a particular theme and find themselves presented with a very useful basis. Indeed, this compilation could keep them going for several years. Individuals who turn to it for private study will, I think, find the last section of special relevance. The rainbow colours of its paperback cover convey not only the spectrum of Unitarian views but also express something of our plural identity to the world outside. At last, we have something like the Quaker *Faith and Practice* to show to ourselves and others.

Of course, there will be reservations. Goblets extracted from their context suffer a degree of distortion and inevitably lose some of their original significance. Yet, in their new setting, they can set up a dialogue with other contributions and thus yield fresh understandings and points of consideration. Every editor is limited by the extent of his/her own knowledge and so there will inevitably be gaps and omissions; some of our better-known writers are surpris-

ingly absent but it would be invidious to name names here. The onus lies with us, the readers, to supplement the materials on offer. In fact, the blank spaces of the text positively invite one to do so, as does the author in his Introduction. Only a lazy Unitarian (if such a creature exists!) would be content for long with the book as it stands. Even our sacred Object is subject to perpetual review. And perhaps Lingwood's greatest achievement lies in providing us with a clear framework and methodology. For once, we can all begin from an agreed base.

The rallying-call currently ringing in our ears is: "We are the people we've been waiting for!" With equal, if not greater, certainty we can also claim: "This is the book we've been waiting for!" A new dawn beckons! Sally forth and purchase it in great numbers immediately!

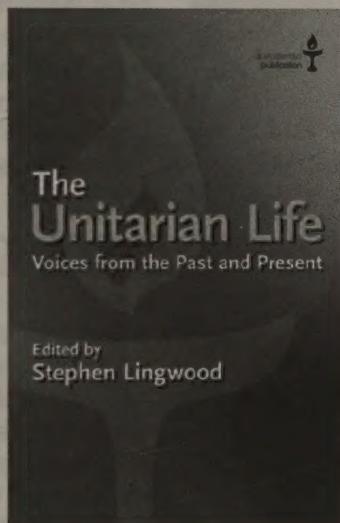
Margaret Hamer is a member of the Bury St Edmunds congregation.

The Unitarian Life is available from Essex Hall for £10.80, incl. p&p. (Address on page 2 of *The Inquirer*.)

Perhaps Lingwood's greatest achievement lies in providing us with a clear framework and methodology. For once, we can all begin from an agreed base.



Stephen Lingwood



Youth Panel offered some answers

By Lynne Readett

John Harley began the General Assembly's Youth Panel meeting by introducing the young people. Highlights of the viewpoints expressed during the question time included, "It's not just for adults, we can join in too" (from Emma Shatliff Whitefield). Zoe and Kieran Brown told us that their first Junior Weekend at Hucklow was a great success "fun filled, they loved the chapel and really enjoyed the snowball fights!" Zoe Rogers from Newcastle-under-Lyme said meeting up with friends and keeping in touch with other Unitarians was important to her. Emma Shatliff echoed the group idea that being Unitarian means free-thinking. Her remark, "We can believe what we feel is right" brought nods of approval all round.

When Andrew from Kingswood Chapel asked "do you tell people you are Unitarian?" Zoe Rogers answered "No, there are too many awkward questions asked if I say I am Unitarian". Perhaps this tells us older ones that our youth will need some guidance to prepare them for those probing questions. James Barry, a Senior Weekend leader, asked if anyone used websites and, yes, Facebook was popular. He told us that there was already a Unitarian link there which brought young people forward to enquire about us.

From the floor, Louise Rogers, Newcastle-under-Lyme, asked about worship experiences, citing last year's GA BUY-AN (British Isles Unitarian Young Adult Network) alternative



Youth Panel members chuckle at 'Question Time'. The Rev John Harley sits centre. Photo by John Hewerdine

worship, which many younger people enjoyed. John Harley spoke of successful worship rituals created at Hucklow weekends that could be transferred to home congregations where youth could run them and make their own Orders of Service. Sarah Warhurst, (Senior Leader) told us that the group would make their own programme for the time at Hatfield and that this could also be transferred to weekend activities at Hucklow if successful.

John Harley confirmed that a new Google group is up and running, designed for sharing children's RE resources and

USPS learned about children who m

By Jo Rogers

Guy Lyon Playfair, author, researcher and journalist, spoke to the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies (USPS) at the General Assembly Meetings. These are some of the ideas he shared:

During the 20th century much research was conducted to try to produce valid evidence for reincarnation, and from the 60s onwards fieldwork really took off, much of it by Ian Stevenson, resulting in 3,000 cases now on record. Studies worldwide suggest that there are four main ways in which evidence for reincarnation manifests itself, usually in young children:

1) They frequently produce memories of events about which they can have no normal knowledge.

2) They may show unaccountable phobias or philias (love) for, say, water, red drinks, aeroplanes, etc. and show inexplicable fondness for people whom they claim to be a former parent.

3) They display precocious talent for skills they have not been taught.

4) They have birthmarks which are found to correspond to wounds which caused the death of the person whose memories they also seem to have inherited.

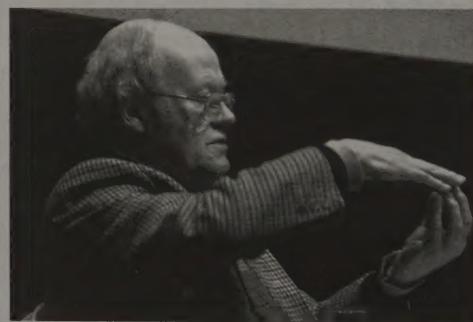
These children's claims and experiences can often be proven to be correct. For example, the child frightened of red drink had a strong affiliation with her uncle who she had never known. She remembered events from his life, and it was subsequently found that he had died from drinking red poison.

Various cultures have expressed belief in a spiritual as well as a physical body. As examples, St. Paul (I Corinthians 15, v 44) says 'If there is a natural body there is also a spiritual body';

Egyptian paintings show the ka or etheric double joined by a cord to the physical body; ancient Hindu teachings describe two invisible bodies, while the Greeks had their double or astral body. Reincarnation is accepted in both Buddhist and Hindu cultures.

However, little is known about the process which brings this about. AR Wallace in 1874 thought that, just as organic life continues by means of the survival of the fittest, so in the spiritual world progressive evolution of the intellectual or moral nature is the destiny of individuals; knowledge, attainments and experience on earth thus form the basis of the spirit life.

Since then, scientists' knowledge of the genes code has only made the whole 'miracle of life' more mysterious since it was discovered that the same master genes that cause a fly to become a fly also cause a human to become a human, and so on throughout the animal kingdom. Many scientists are forced to



Guy Lyon Playfair

Question Time'

youth issues. It is called 'Unitarian Family Network' and anyone interested in joining should contact louise.baumberg@googlemail.com. New Chalice Award Scheme modules were rolled out under the title of "Nine pack", and were welcomed by all. Martin West shared the information that finances were in place to keep John Harley as our Youth Co-ordinator for at least another two and half years; this news was greeted with applause and shouts of appreciation.

John closed the session by inviting the youth from the North of England to mix water with some that he had brought from London; he then asked people to come forward and take a blessing or share a blessing with another person. People stepped forward and touched the water to hand or head, each to their own personal choice, a secret meaning known only to themselves, to take away and keep to themselves or share as they wished. John completed the session by touching his hands into the water and then sprinkling first the young people and then himself, finishing with hands together and bowing (Hindu style). Namaste John and thank you for the caring and inspirational way in which you hold our young people close to your heart in the everyday actions of your life.

The Rev Lynne Readette is Merseyside Partnership Minister with responsibility for Park Lane Chapel, Ashton in Makerfield and Cairo Street Chapel

be reincarnated

the opinion that there must be 'something else'; 'a formative principle'; 'a strange organising power'. R Sheldrake, 1981, hypothesises that the form, development and behaviour of living creatures are dictated by fields which in turn are shaped by the form and activity of previous organisms of the same species, a process he calls 'morphic resonance'. Similarly, it should follow that something of present bodies survives their death to influence future bodies. Various 20th century scientists have put forward theories that spirit is attracted to matter and joined by molecules; or that some faculties are retained in a kind of template which transfers certain faculties from one life to another even though at birth the spirit usually forgets its memories. HG Andrade posited a theory that, just as the embryo physically grows very quickly, so simultaneously the spiritual body develops, layer by layer, as a psychological synthesis of intellectual, moral and spiritual achievements and experiences from previous lives, some of these experiences and memories definitely coming from lives other than those of our ancestors.

None of these theories have been, or can yet be, proved, apart from individual cases of children's memories, knowledge, or birthmarks, which have been substantiated after their claims have been researched. There still remains no testable explanation as to how or why these experiences come about. However, the empirical research on experiences of large numbers of children suggests that there is some form of consciousness which continues to exist after physical death.

Jo Rogers is a member of the Kendal congregation.

ICUU spurs growth

By David Shaw

The Rev John Clifford, Executive Secretary of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU), opened the meeting by explaining that the ICUU had a busy year, especially as the period covered the council's biannual conference in Germany in November 2007, and more recently had organised and run a Leadership Conference for participants from six African nations in February 2008.

To complement his introduction, John was then able to introduce three speakers with very different first-hand experience of the ICUU in action.

The first to speak, the Rev David Usher, explained in some detail the African Leadership Conference, at which both he and John Clifford had been pleased to be staff members. The conference itself had been particularly demanding as there were some 60 participants. But David also reminded the meeting that February had been an unsettled time in Kenya. Indeed, it was not until the very last minute that it was decided to go ahead with the conference.

David explained that as an overseas visitor he had not experienced any difficulties resulting from the troubles, but for many attending from within Kenya it had required a difficult journey across areas of the country which were far from settled.

However, journey they all did and the participants came to Kenya from Congo, Nigeria, South Africa, Burundi and Uganda. It was explained that although Unitarianism is long established in both South Africa and Nigeria, its origins in the other four countries are very recent.

The Rev David Shaw reflected upon the biannual meeting of the Council in Oberwesel in Germany, at which he had been elected Treasurer. He spoke about how exciting it had been to meet Unitarians from so many different countries and how through such contact we are privileged to have close and personal international contact.

David also explained that at the Council Meeting he had experienced African and Latin American Unitarian worship for the first time; the formats were both exhilarating and challenging. However, he reflected that it was a challenge that he was only too pleased to accept as our Unitarian family grows and explained that the leading figures in these countries had his admiration, as they are truly – pioneers.

The final speaker was Mark Kiyimba from Uganda. Mark explained that although from a Catholic background he had come to a Unitarian position and then been delighted to be able to make contact with the international Unitarian community and through that meet with other Unitarians in Africa.

We heard how the number of congregations and Unitarians is growing and also that, even though there are limited resources, these Ugandan congregations were opening places to worship and schools.

Although the emphasis of the meeting was on the development of Unitarianism in Africa, we were left with no doubt as to the development and growth elsewhere in our exciting and fascinating – global Unitarian family.

The Rev David Shaw is minister at Great Hucklow.

Senior Weekend: A place to make friends

By Isabelle Rosenberg

In March, I was very excited to be going to 'Senior Weekend!' This is a weekend away for 14-17 year-olds and the theme this year was 'Beat It!' After five hours (It has to be said that it was the longest train journey of my life!) I arrived at Stockport, where I was picked up by my friend Sam and was taken to the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. As my train was late, we missed the food but my 'be prepared' mother had packed enough for me to feed everyone there!

On Saturday we had a drumming class, which was my favourite part of the whole weekend! The people who came to teach us talked about the Rio carnivals and they showed us some of the weirdest instruments I've ever seen! One was like a bow and arrow and one was a drum with a stick in it; to play it you had to rub the stick with a damp cloth (you had to be there!). The best part of the drumming was when we were all playing together and a group of boys started to dance in a circle!



Senior Weekend participants went on a long walk at the Peak National Park. Photo by James Barry

We were in Credo groups for some of the weekend. In these groups, we discussed important happenings in the world. In one of the groups, we talked about who has cared for us and who we think we have cared for. It made us think about the people to whom we owe so much to without realising it.

Also on the Saturday, we went for a walk. I have to say that I do not like walking in the least and the best part for me was the break in the middle when we stopped in the shop and bought food! But there were some fun parts, such as when my friend Sammie was carrying my other friend Steph over a muddy river and they both fell in, and when we were standing on top of a very windy hill and John (Harley) was trying to map-read but the wind kept blowing the map away! I complained to John afterwards about why we have to do the walks and he said that it was good for us all to go out as a group. And I feel that now, when I can look back at that walk and laugh, I can see what he means. During the walk I was able to talk to most of the people on the weekend. And we talked about things that I don't think we would normally discuss with our usual friends.



Senior Weekend participants run across a hill near Great Hucklow. Photo by James Barry

Before going home, on the Sunday morning after chapel, it was time to be 'troughed'. This is when we walk down to the trough (at the end of the village), which is filled with water, and this is poured over your head. This is carried out when it is your first time to one of these weekends. So I ended up being 'troughed', I don't think my head has ever been so cold!

Then I had a very eventful train journey back to Bridgend, in which I realised that all of my trains were cancelled and I had to change three times to get home! But I have to say that I cannot wait to do it all over again in the summer when I'll be going on Five Days Away! (Another programme for young people at Hucklow.) These weekends aren't just a one-off chance to meet up with other people, but to make real friends who you can talk to even when you don't see them for months at a time. It's also a great chance to meet up with other Unitarians who are outside of the district, as other Unitarian teenagers are few and far between.

Isabelle Rosenberg (15) lives in Porthcawl, South Wales.



A Senior Weekend participant gets 'troughed' – a Great Hucklow tradition where new weekend participants are soaked at the village horse trough. Photo by James Barry

How to get your church noticed

By Neville Kenyon

Photographing Unitarian notice boards may be considered a somewhat eccentric pastime. I have now collected well over 100 images, some of which have been sent to me by congregations following an appeal on the General Assembly e-mail list. I thank those who entered into the spirit of the project by sending me these – there is still room in the collection for more.

The reason for my embarking on this project was a growing awareness that we spend so much time in publicising our community via web sites whilst the simple, basic means of attracting visitors are too often neglected.

It is interesting to actually take notice of all the commercial signs on the local high street. One never sees those on banks, building societies or national multiples in poor condition. So why should our church signs be so bad?

A major reason is, of course, cost. A decent new notice board in the traditional style can cost well in excess of £1,000 and many of our congregations believe they have higher priorities for using their limited resources. However, there are alternatives to the traditional wooden board and some of our congregations have favoured wall-mounted off-the-shelf display units. There are also flexible banners similar to those used by car showrooms. We should think beyond the conventional. A useful web site to visit in this connection is www.getyourchurchnoticed.com. This is an Anglican site and their recommended book *100 Ways to Get Your Church Noticed* contains many useful hints. Another relevant site is www.signsexpress.co.uk (also see Yellow Pages or your local telephone directory) which will probably have a branch near you. They offer free advice regarding all types of signage that they produce using state-of-the-art methods that eliminate the need for traditional (and expensive) sign-writing.

The General Assembly Executive Committee has agreed to promote a grant initiative for setting up new or for upgrading notice boards. This has been taken up by over a dozen of our congregations and Marion Baker is co-ordinating the project on behalf of the Communication Commission. Marion may be contacted at 145, Tullibardine Road, Greystones, Sheffield S11 7GN; Tel: 0114 266 1070; E-mail: marion@baker4677.freeserve.co.uk.

Notice boards can be time-consuming if regular updates are required, but they should not be at the bottom of our priority list – which they so often appear to be. We should recognise



Ainsworth has a particularly good notice board. Photo by Neville Kenyon.

their importance as the first impression that we give to potential visitors.

During my photographic expeditions, I have noted that many of the boards are totally empty – the worst being littered with remnants of Wayside Pulpit posters stuck on several years previously. Some contain too much information including a full history of the church and a list of all the activities that take place – including some which a casual observer may deem eccentric, although experienced members view as normal. Some of our congregations have a surfeit of boards, having erected new ones but failed to dismantle the old! Occasionally, the name of the last-minister-but-one was still prominent on the notice board.

The basic principle is to keep the notice board simple and bold, a “taster” to attract people inside. Basic details will include the name of congregation, including the town or village name, web site, minister contact and address details, email, phone number, times of service and maybe a simple strap line – such as my favourite – “A sacred space in the heart of Brighton”. They must also be kept up to date. For Christmas services still to be advertised in March is hardly the mark of a vibrant, dynamic community.

And finally, please do try to conform to the UK Unitarian Consistent Identity!

Neville Kenyon is a member of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly.

Fellowship combines faith, literature

The Reading Fellowship meets monthly and has a regular attendance of between eight and 13 people. Currently, the Fellowship starts with 10 to 16 minutes of devotions and then discusses Rev Jo Lane's 'Home and Away'. Once a quarter, a preacher is arranged on the London preaching plan. At its May meeting, the service was led by John Carter from Tooting. In the photograph (right) are some of the members who were present in May. Standing are Sue Teagle and Peter Godfrey. Seated, from left to right, are Sheila Godfrey, Gwendoline Wingate, John Carter and Jeffrey Teagle.

– Peter Godfrey



Letters to the Editor

Imaginative thinking is needed for future progress

To the Editor:

I have read with interest all the documents regarding the work of the Future Ministry Panel, and very fine work it is indeed! What I felt is missing so far, however, is the issue regarding ministerial training. Should we not now be recognising that two or three years of full-time study is not always appropriate or practical? I know of individuals who have jobs, family and mortgages who would love to apply for the ministry but who just cannot envisage giving everything up for a couple of years to train. Other denominations cracked this problem some years ago, allowing candidates to keep their jobs and their mortgages but train on weekends and holidays, with distance-learning to complement it. The Northern Ordination Course is an example of such an initiative. Also, other denominations have recognised that not all applicants for the ministry wish to be full-time but wish to retain their other jobs and pursue the ministry in other ways, either without a stipend, or with a small stipend for running a small congregation.

If we could just be a little bit more imaginative in our thinking, we could go some way to solving the leadership crisis that is now beginning to bite hard.

Rev Dr Vernon Marshall

Denton and Dukinfield congregations

Searching for Beatrix Potter's Unitarian connections

To the Editor:

I am preparing a paper on Beatrix Potter's Unitarian connections and I would be interested to hear from anyone who has, or knows of, unpublished material that would be of relevance. Beatrix Potter's family were connected with Cross Street Chapel, Manchester; with congregations in Hyde, Dukinfield and Stalybridge in East Cheshire; and with Little Portland Street Chapel, Essex Church, and possibly Hampstead, in London. I already have her 'Journal', her published letters, Linda Lear's excellent biography, 'Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature' (just out in paperback,

incidentally!) and several other books and booklets, so it is items that may have escaped the attention of Beatrix Potter scholars that I am particularly interested in. One avenue that I would like to explore further is Beatrix Potter's involvement (as a scientific illustrator) with Caroline Martineau's educational projects for working men and women in the 1890s. Linda Lear has something about this in her book, but I know that she, too, would like to know more.

Another thing I would be interested in is any evidence that Beatrix Potter or her family ever had any contact with the Unitarian Chapel in Kendal, either on their long summer holidays in the lakes or after she settled in the area. So far there seems to be none!

(Rev) Cliff Reed

95 Tuddenham Road
Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 2SY

Where have all the honorifics gone?

To the Editor:

What is it about titles? I seem to be getting more and more post, including from Essex Hall, where the envelope is addressed with my full name, but without any title.

I find this very discourteous. Is a minister less of a Reverend when he or she retires? Am I less of a 'Miss' because I am retired?

Can I ask that everyone who reads this kindly addresses envelopes with 'Rev', 'Mr', 'Mrs' or 'Miss', in future please.

Ann Hughes (Miss)

West Bromwich

Perhaps committee should consider virtual hymnbook

To the Editor:

It was good to read David Dawson's report on the progress of the new hymn-book (*Inquirer* 17 May) and in particular that the Hymnbook Panel has adopted a wide-ranging approach to sourcing tunes – although with David at the helm there was never any danger of its not doing so!

I am a little concerned that the Panel might gather in all the necessary copyright permissions before it can agree on the colour of the cover of the new book!

This led me to thinking that – as a book of 225 hymns could hardly be sold for less than £20 a copy – it might be a stretch for congregations to find £500 or more all at once. One way round that might be for the new book to be made available through on-line subscription in the first instance, with hymns being downloaded as required.

I feel sure that, if it were approached, the National Unitarian Fellowship would be able to help with such an arrangement.

Mike Killingworth

London

More praise for third-person-singular

To the Editor:

Thank you, Roderick Ramage for your letter on grammar (*Inquirer* 17 May). I thought I was the only person left who complains about poor English. I tend to do it under my breath, as correcting other people's mistakes is not a popular activity.

Please note: even if a singular entity like a business has a name that sounds plural – Smith & Sons, for example; that business still takes the third-person-singular verb:

Smith & Sons is a very successful firm.

Dorothy Haughton

Crickheath, Oswestry

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

An exciting time to enter ministry

By Ernest Baker

A pleasant, unexpected surprise of the Assembly Meetings for me was the very positive comment from several folk after my contribution to the debate on the Ministry Commission report. The Fellowship had just been received into the Assembly as a member group, and the subsequent presentation of the Ministry Commission report seemed to have fallen on un-moved ears. This was quite a momentous decision by the Fellowship intended to underline (because it was there already in the life-offering professional Ministers give to the denomination) commitment to the Assembly – its hopes, ideals, witness. My comment was well nigh off the cuff, wishing to emphasise that future ministry (capitals or no) was/is a crucial matter. Off the cuff indeed, but my feeling was long-standing and deeply-held. I have been proud to be a Unitarian Minister, to be now part of the history, albeit modestly. Whilst reflecting on “my generation’s” past, I do think and feel, with a touch of almost-envy, that this is an exciting time to be beginning such a career, and I wanted to endorse and encourage my young colleagues.

We were quite “down” in the mid-70s, as I began, carrying very recent double personal loss. “Religion”/“Theology” was largely dismissed as irrelevant, though as Unitarians we did our best to bang on that it was a matter of the non-supernatural sacred shooting through everyday life; well, that’s how I saw it, anyway! The aspirations of those I admired were towards a career in social work, probation, teaching, nursing, the ministry... God forbid, not the law, accountancy, or management consultancy, the last resort of pathetically failing business.

Always a “development Minister”, I recall having modest hopes, of the “hanging-on” rather than spectacular growth variety, not least after an officer of one of the congregations I began to seek to serve, bless him, informed me straight away that “this chapel will only last a few years.” It’s still with us, just, not one of the two “edifices” I, “single-handedly”, did manage to close down!

Just how different the whole atmosphere is now – inside and out – almost beggars description. So many technical aids, such awareness of group processes (tools, please note; not ends in themselves); a new-found confidence in being relevant, “a faith with a future”, despite any modest numbers; Religion, or its pseudo-side, “important” in the life of society again, and fundamentalism and growing superstition rampant. Do we need to look for our “Mission” when a Bishop of Durham no less, can describe the Enlightenment as “an intellectual hijack”!? Shame, then, that some people seem to misunderstand the why and how of some of us wanting to recover God, soul, the Bible, to “recover the language of faith”. The life of faith is something other than a good business plan, slick organisation, “inclusivity”, though there is no reason why the devil should have any such monopoly.

The downside these days is an often touching faith amongst us in aspects of the “secular fundamentalism” which is management/organisation/change theory. I’ve always found Stephen Pattison’s “The Faith of the Managers” (Cassell, 1997) a useful religious corrective to give pause. There is always the challenge to leave room for the “wasting” of the Holy Spirit.

One thing puzzles me in the talk about “Future Ministry”, namely, reference to “models” of Ministry, which seems to me a misnomer. Ministry is unchanging through the generations

in my book...though the context of trying to exercise it can vary. Then again, there is the Dream-concern that “...we seem to work counterproductively in relation to our future”. What does that mean? Minister and layfolk at odds? There is that beyond any “achievements” of a ministry, though it is perhaps no more than the opportunity a few times only in a lifetime to be a channel of “the grace of God”. I suspect my young colleagues will still have to cope with being the expected Messiah, and the one responsible for it all going wrong. But more power to their elbows!

A footnote: quite by coincidence, an attempted study clear-out the other day turned up the draft of my application for ministerial training. I find I wrote, “...the fact that *some* people, as it has always been it seems, find it necessary to search for the meaning of life, find it necessary to seek the spiritual and the highest in human aspiration in terms which are meaningful for their own particular age, means that that search must continue, and not be allowed to go by default because of an apparent rejection of its validity as a human activity by so many people. Quite apart from any remaining “de-mythologising” to be done in regard to the Christian tradition, still apparently very necessary, there would appear to be a growing need for a new de-mythologising - a scientific and technological one.” Yes, well! In the words of the ultimate sermon cliché, “How true that is even today!”

The Rev Ernest Baker is a retired Unitarian Minister



Ernest Baker speaks at the GA

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News in brief



Despite being up in the hills outside Bolton, Walmsley Unitarian Chapel attracts a lively congregation, typically 50-plus on Sunday mornings and welcomed a visit by then-GA President, the Rev Celia Midgley for Mothering Sunday. A renovation programme is presently in hand and the Rev Desmond Porter explained how the congregation had been invited to vote for their priority. Should it be a resurfacing of the approach drive, a new swell box for the organ or a re-plastering of the entrance porch? This picture is one of a series by congregation member Neil Wainwright, as a fundraiser for the renovation. John Midgley

Events to support Tibet at St Saviourgate

This weekend sees the start of a series of events in York to raise awareness about Tibet and to raise funds.

On Friday, 30 May at 7.30pm the award-winning film "Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion" will be shown at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel. This epic story of the courage and compassion of the Tibetan people took 10 years to make and includes stunning views of Tibet and its culture. Doors open at 7.00 pm with a chance to see information stalls, displays about Tibet and refreshments before the film at 7.30 pm.

On Sunday 1 June, after the regular 11 am Sunday morning service at St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, there will be a bring-and-share lunch at noon. All are very welcome. There will be displays, stalls and an interactive CD with extensive information about all aspects of Tibetan life and culture, items for sale and a recent documentary film, made undercover by an exiled Tibetan.

Both events are free, with a suggested donation of £3.00 (£1.50 concessions).

"The Beijing Olympic Games have heightened international awareness of the plight of the Tibetan people and we have planned these events to coincide with this week's visit of The Dalai Lama to England," says organiser Rowena Field from the York Tibet support Group. "We would like as many people as possible to know more about the needs of the Tibetan people and ways in which it is possible to help them."

There are also two further Tibet support events: a Healing and Awareness afternoon on Saturday 7 June, from 1pm to 5pm, at The Healing Clinic, Club Chambers, Museum Street, with a variety of complementary therapies on offer; and at 8.30pm on Sunday 15 June, a Musical Fundraiser for Tibet at The Black Swan, Peasholme Green.

For further information about any of these events, please contact: Rowena Field on (01904) 656504 or e-mail: rfield151@yahoo.co.uk.

— Janet Eldred

Problems of communication

Amongst speakers at the UCCN (Unitarian Communication Co-ordinators' Network) conference at Great Hucklow in February was the Rev Steve Dick, Chief Executive of the GA. He spoke about the problems of communication within the movement, though there are probably similar problems in all spheres of activity. He suggested that:

- a) We get too passionate about issues and this prevents us from listening properly to others' views.
- b) Despite being supposedly a loving and caring group, we are good at assuming there is malevolence directed towards us.
- c) Having come, often, from other religious traditions – indeed having fled from them – we are 'haunted' and have a problem with the use of religious language.
- d) We have problems of definition. We are unable to reach agreement on what Unitarianism is.
- e) We have deep anxieties about the concept of a leader, and certainly about whether the Movement should have a leader.
- f) We do not actually have a single Unitarian culture – rather we are a group of tribes.
- g) We risk being so focused that we miss the vital thing.

Following his talk, others brought out further problems – a supposed, if not real, lack of transparency; the ambiguity of where authority lies, or the locale of power; too much autonomy; bewilderment about the purpose of the General Assembly!

— Kate Taylor

Global Chalice Lighting for June

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists announces the 58th in its monthly series of global chalice lighting readings. We ask each congregation to use the reading for one worship service in the designated month, identifying it as the "Global Chalice Lighting". This Global Chalice Lighting is to be used during June 2008.

Our fellowship of freedom shares with the ancient Hebrews a sense of covenant toward a land of promise. Our fellowship shares with the philosophers of Greece a continuing discussion towards truth. Our fellowship cherishes the spirit of Jesus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Our fellowship cherishes the Reformation spirit, "Everyone shall be a priest."

We keep the faith of Francis David of Transylvania, "You need not think alike to love alike." We keep the faith of English and American prophets who struggled against the slavery of body and brain. We seek the tender compassion of sages in India who held in all things a "reverence for life." We seek the serenity and balance found in the meditation of China and Japan.

Conscious of sacrifices that are the price of freedom, conscious of the continuing threat to life and liberty, we commit ourselves in this community as pilgrims who seek, as persons who serve, as pioneers who build.

— Richard Boeke, British General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches